

First, the bill would simplify the DOD process and make it more consistent. Any servicemember found unfit for duty—regardless of the severity of the disability—would receive a lifetime annuity based on rank and years of service and would receive other retirement benefits, such as commissary and exchange privileges. Eligibility for TRICARE would be determined by Congress or DOD, after further studies on that issue.

These changes would get DOD out of the business of assigning disability ratings, ending the duplicative system that now makes injured veterans get rated by both DOD and VA. It would also create a bright line rule on what benefits a medically discharged servicemember would receive. Different branches of the military would no longer provide different levels of benefits to servicemembers with the same injuries.

Under my bill, veterans would receive both their entire DOD annuity plus any VA disability benefits they are eligible for. This would put an end to the confusing practice of offsetting some DOD and VA benefits.

This bill would also help modernize the VA disability system. The VA's outdated disability rating schedule would be entirely replaced by a new schedule that is based on modern science and medicine. It will also take into account the impact that a disability has on both a veteran's average loss of earning capacity and loss of quality of life. As we now know, quality of life—time spent with family, community and nonwork activities—is also affected by disability. Shouldn't our disability system reflect the impact service-related disabilities have on those important aspects of life, too?

Also, this bill would provide more emphasis on treatment and rehabilitation. Veterans discharged from service because of disability would be eligible for transition payments, either during the three month period following their separation or during a period of rehabilitation. These payments would help cover family living expenses, so an injured veteran would be better able to focus on rehabilitation, training, and getting back into the workforce. These are commonsense options and solutions for today's veterans living in the modern world.

Lastly, I want all veterans, whether having served in World War II, Vietnam, or Afghanistan, to have access to an improved system. My bill does not distinguish between combat and non-combat injuries; does not leave the outdated rating schedule in place; and does not prevent veterans of any generation from choosing to join the new, improved system. Also, as recommended by veterans' organizations, my efforts were guided by the work of both the Dole-Shalala Commission and the Veterans' Disability Benefits Commission.

How will we actually accomplish the goals of making the system simpler,

consistent and more modern? Under this bill, the Department of Veterans Affairs would conduct a series of studies and would send to Congress a proposal outlining a new rating schedule and the amount and duration of transition payments. To make sure these recommendations don't get put on a shelf to collect dust—as has happened in the past—the entire VA proposal would be subject to an up-or-down vote by Congress.

If these changes are enacted, it would eliminate the confusion and delay now caused by the overlapping VA and DOD functions and put a greater emphasis on the recovery of our wounded servicemembers. It would update the rating system to take into account modern concepts of disability and make sure that veterans are compensated for any loss in their quality of life.

As a final note, I want to acknowledge that reforming the disability system may require a large, upfront cost. But, if we do it right, we will be making a real investment in the future of our nation's veterans. Given the character of the men and women of our Armed Forces, this investment will come with little risk and great reward.

We cannot put this off for another 50 years and hope another generation will fix the disability system later. We have young men and women returning home from war with devastating injuries that most of us could not fathom enduring, let alone at such young ages.

The sad truth is that, even though the disability system was already outdated more than five decades ago, Congress and past administrations have not made the necessary changes to keep pace with modern society, a changing economy, and new attitudes towards disability. I believe I have an idea why: This is really hard stuff. This is a complicated system and it is often easier to use band-aids and quick fixes to get us through times of crisis. But, the Walter Reed stories showed all of us last year that wounded warriors—those injured while fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan—are the ones who pay the price for our inaction. And every day we continue to wait is another day they continue to pay that price. They deserve better.

We need to listen to the wake-up call that the Walter Reed stories sent all of us. We must act now, and that is why I have introduced a bill that will update the system to meet the needs and expectations of today's veterans and does not leave tomorrow's veterans with a system that was already outdated before they were even born. Our veterans deserve a system that is more straightforward, up-to-date, and consistent and that is open to all.

Mr. President, I urge my colleagues to remember the "call to action" we received last year when serious problems were publicly exposed at Walter Reed, and I ask them to join me in improving the lives of our veterans.

RETIREMENT OF DR. MICHAEL DAVID FREED

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I welcome this opportunity to pay tribute on the occasion of his retirement to Dr. Michael David Freed of Children's Hospital Boston for his service to the hospital and the thousands of children and young adults from Massachusetts and beyond who have benefited from his care.

Dr. Freed has had a long and distinguished career at the hospital and Harvard Medical School, beginning in 1970, when he arrived to complete his fellowship training. At Children's Hospital, he rose to become senior associate in cardiology in 1976 and chief of the Division of Inpatient Cardiology in 1996.

Dr. Freed is a physician's physician. His commitment to providing the best possible care for children with heart disease is unwavering. He has used his breadth and depth of knowledge, his clarity of thought, his empathy, and his sense of humor to train more than 200 pediatric cardiology fellows and innumerable pediatric residents in the fundamentals of congenital heart disease. As a member of the Sub-board of Pediatric Cardiology, he ensured the highest quality of care by setting standards for board certification for young pediatric cardiologists.

At Children's Hospital, Dr. Freed has chaired or served on more than two dozen committees, projects, and task forces, ranging from quality improvement and patient care to graduate medical education and governance. His contributions extend well beyond Boston. He has served on the executive committees of all three major national organizations in his field—the American Heart Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American College of Cardiology, where he currently serves on the board of trustees. He is also a member of editorial boards in the field of cardiology, and regularly has been included on lists of "top physicians" ranging from the book "Best Doctors in America" to Good Housekeeping and Boston Magazine. He is consulted by other pediatric cardiologists from around the world who seek his opinion on the care of their patients.

Dr. Freed has also written extensively in the field of pediatric cardiology and cardiac surgery and is particularly recognized for his work in the newborn physiology of congenital heart disease, infective endocarditis, and valvular heart disease. He has authored more than 60 original articles, contributed more than 40 reviews, chapters, and editorials, and developed more than 25 clinical communications and instructive CD ROMs. His leadership in establishing clinical practice guidelines for early postoperative management of children in Boston undergoing open-heart surgery was a model for the development of such guidelines nationally. In addition, he has been a member of national working groups to develop guidelines on optimal care of individuals with heart disease.

I commend Dr. Freed for his outstanding career and his achievements in improving the quality of care for children and young people with congenital heart disease in Boston and throughout the world, and I wish him well in retirement.

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

STAFF SERGEANT MICHAEL D. ELLEDGE

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. President, I rise today to honor the life of SSG Michael Elledge of Fort Carson, CO. On March 17, a bomb exploded near the humvee Sergeant Elledge was driving, killing him and SPC Christopher C. Simpson, of Hampton, VA. Sergeant Elledge was assigned to C Company, 1st Battalion, 68th Armored Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, out of Fort Carson, CO. He was 41 years old.

Those who knew Mike Elledge describe him as a man committed to his family, faith, and duty to his country. He first donned a uniform after graduating from high school in Michigan in 1985. He served 4 years with the Marines. After discharging, he became a licensed aircraft mechanic and moved to Indiana, where he took a job with United Airlines. For 14 years he worked for United, lived in Brownsburg, and raised three children—Christopher, Caleb, and Cassidy—with his wife Carleen.

But Mike's life changed after the attacks of September 11, 2001. We cannot forget that the tragedies of that day were not confined to New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania. The ripples quickly spread to all corners of the country as people learned of friends and family members who were hurt or killed and as the economic impacts hit home with job losses and dislocations.

Mike was among the tens of thousands of Americans who lost their job in the wake of the September 11 attacks. United Airlines, struggling to recover after the disaster, closed the doors on its Brownsburg facility, leaving Mike without a job.

We each have our own way of confronting adversity in our lives. For Michael Elledge, the terror and tragedy of September 11 was a call to service—a call to reenlist. So, at age 38, Sergeant Elledge joined the Army. In 2005, he deployed to Iraq for a 1-year rotation. Last December, he and the Third Brigade Combat Team out of Fort Carson deployed again, this time for a projected 15-month tour.

Sergeant Elledge carried his deeply rooted faith into battle with him. His friends say he was passionately committed to helping Iraqis build a country where they could enjoy freedom and security. For this, Sergeant Elledge embodied the best of a soldier—he was devoted to his duty with the knowledge that his service could make others' lives better.

This is the type of citizen that Americans have celebrated for generations. President Theodore Roosevelt, in a speech at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1910,

praised the values that Sergeant Elledge embodied and claimed that it is the "man in the arena" who makes history.

"It is not the critic who counts," said President Roosevelt, "not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

Mr. President, Sergeant Elledge knew what a difference he could make and was not afraid to make it. He was the "man in the arena" for whom President Roosevelt had such high praise.

No words or ceremony, of course, can properly honor the life and loss of a soldier like Sergeant Elledge, but we wish to console his friends and family and remember his contributions. That is why scores of firefighters lined the overpasses of Sacramento, CA, to honor his return; that is why flags are flying in his hometown of Placerville, MI; and that is why the bugles will sound at Fort Carson in Colorado Springs.

To Sergeant Elledge's wife, Carleen, his sons, Christopher and Caleb, his daughter, Cassidy, his parents, Marion and Christopher, and to all his friends and family, our thoughts and prayers are with you. No words can lessen the pain and grief that you feel, but I hope that in time your sorrow will be salved by the knowledge that Mike served his country with honor and that we are all grateful for his courage, his sacrifice, and his heroism. He will never be forgotten.

STAFF SERGEANT DAVID D. JULIAN

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I rise today to express our Nation's deepest thanks and gratitude to a special young man and his family. I was saddened to receive word that on March 10, 2008, SSG David Julian of Evanston, WY, was killed in the line of duty while serving our country in the war on terrorism. Along with four of his fellow soldiers, Staff Sergeant Julian died from injuries he sustained in a suicide bomber attack in Baghdad, Iraq.

Staff Sergeant Julian was assigned to D Company, 1st Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division, Fort Stewart, GA. He joined the Army right after his graduation from Evanston High School in 1994. He loved the Army and his country and was serving his fourth tour of duty in Iraq. Following his first tour, he laid the wreath for

the dedication of the Fallen Comrade Memorial in downtown Evanston. He was laid to rest in his hometown, where he was remembered by family and friends as a determined and courageous warrior, an honorable soldier, and a loving husband and father.

It is because of David Julian that we continue to live safe and free. America's men and women who answer the call to service and wear our Nation's uniform deserve respect and recognition for the enormous burden that they willingly bear. They put everything on the line every day, and because of them and their families, our Nation remains free and strong in the face of danger.

In the Book of John, Jesus said that, "Greater love has no man than this, that he lay his life down for his friend." SSG David Julian gave his life, that last full measure of devotion, for you, me, and every single American. He gave his life defending his country and its people, and we honor him for this selfless sacrifice.

Staff Sergeant Julian is survived by his wife Erin and baby daughter Elizabeth, his mother Bonnie and father Wally, brothers Eric, Chris, and Mark, and sisters Misty, Becky, and Kellee. He is also survived by his brothers and sisters in arms of the U.S. Army. We say goodbye to a husband, a father, a son, a brother, and an American soldier. Our Nation pays its deepest respect to SSG David D. Julian for his courage, his love of country, and his sacrifice, so that we may remain free. He was a hero in life and he remains a hero in death. All of Wyoming, and indeed the entire Nation, is proud of him. May God bless him and his family and welcome him with open arms.

(At the request of Mr. REID, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

SECOND CHANCE ACT OF 2007

• Mr. OBAMA. Mr. President, I wish to speak in favor of the Second Chance Act of 2007, a bill to strengthen community safety by improving the reintegration of people returning from prison. The Senate recently passed this measure, and I am proud to have worked over the past few years with Senators BIDEN, BROWNBACK, and SPENCER to see this important bill reach this point. Having passed in the House as well, the Second Chance Act is now ready for President Bush's signature, and I urge him to sign this bill into law as soon as possible.

We have a broken criminal justice system and too many people are caught in its web, especially African-American men, nearly a third of whom will enter State or Federal prison during their lives. What is equally tragic is that nearly two-thirds of the 1,800 people released from prison every day return to jail within 3 years.

The stark reality is that most communities where prisoners go upon release already struggle with highly concentrated poverty, unemployment,